

C. SITE SELECTION AND RANKING OF SIGNIFICANCE

A total of 96 natural areas are described in this report. These areas were chosen because of their ecological significance, in terms of quality and integrity of the natural communities, the population size and condition of rare plants or animals, or the uniqueness or importance of the geomorphic features. For each site selected for inclusion in this report, a level of significance is designated, using National, State, and Regional (denoted A, B, and C, respectively). This designation of significance follows that of the N.C. Natural Heritage Program.

The following are descriptions of the significance categories utilized in this inventory.

- A. NATIONAL significance. The natural area is considered to be of national importance. The site is one of the premier (perhaps in the top 5 or 6) natural areas of its kind in the country featuring an exemplary natural community, rare or endangered species population, or outstanding geomorphic feature. Usually such a site is in relatively undisturbed condition and is often extensive in size, or the population sizes of the significant plants and animals are large and healthy. Such a natural area is given an extremely high priority for protection.
- B. STATE significance. The natural area is considered to be of statewide importance. The site contains one the best 5 or 6 examples of a given natural community, rare or endangered species population, or outstanding geomorphic feature in the state. However, there are other natural areas with similar ecological features that are more significant elsewhere in the state or in other states (i.e., of National significance). Usually the community is relatively undisturbed and the populations of the rare species are fairly large. Such a natural area is given a very high priority for protection.
- C. REGIONAL significance. The natural area is considered to be of regional importance; that is, it is one of the most significant sites in that portion of the physiographic province in the state. For this report, it is one of the most significant sites in the northeastern portion of the Coastal Plain. However, there are other natural areas with similar ecological features that are more significant elsewhere in the Coastal Plain of North Carolina (or elsewhere within the same region if they are of National or State significance). Such a natural area is given a high priority for protection.

It should be emphasized that the priority rankings of the natural areas in this inventory are based solely on their biological and geomorphic significance, and not on the degree of threat or on the amount of protection afforded them. For many of the sites, the threats are not known.